THAT WHICH IS CLAIMED:

1.   A method for comparing the performance of business entities, the method comprising the operations of:

5   establishing a mathematical frame of reference that is based upon historical data for at least both first and second entities of a plurality of entities;

determining a rating value based upon the mathematical frame of reference and data for the first entity; and

presenting the rating value to the first entity without disclosing the data for the

10   second entity to the first entity.

2.   A method according to claim 1, wherein the operation of presenting the rating value to the first entity includes presenting the rating value in the form of a colored icon.

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3.   A method according to claim 1, further comprising determining performance indicator values that are related to the rating value and presenting the performance indicator values to the first entity in response to a selection made by the first entity while the first entity was viewing the rating value.

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4.   A method according to claim 1, wherein the establishing operation includes obtaining a value for a performance indicator for the first entity and a value for the performance indicator for the second entity.

25   5.   A method according to claim 4, further comprising tracking the value for the performance indicator for first entity over time.

6.   A method according to claim 4, wherein the operation of obtaining a value for a performance indicator includes using the same equation for calculating the value for

30   the performance indicator for the first entity and the value for the performance indicator

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for the second entity, with different groups of account balances being the inputs to the equation for the first and second entities.

7.   A method according to claim 1, further comprising uploading the data to a web server via the Internet, wherein the establishing and determining operations are performed by the web server, and the presenting operation includes downloading the rating value from the web server to a computer via the Internet, and presenting a screen display, which includes the rating value, on a monitor associated with the computer.

8.   A method according to claim 1, wherein the presenting operation includes disclosing the identity of the second entity to he first entity.

9.   A method according to claim 1, wherein the data is for the same type of goods or services.

10.   A method according to claim 1, wherein the data is selected from the group consisting of sales, expenses, gross profit and net profit.

11.   A method according to claim 1, wherein the establishing operation includes establishing a frame of reference selected from the group consisting of:

a frequency distribution,

a statistical measure of central tendency, and

a spread between lowest and highest data values of the data.

12.   A method according to claim 1, wherein the determining operation includes determining a relationship selected from the group consisting of:

rank,

a measure of difference between data from the first entity and a statistical measure of central tendency, and

an indication of position of data from the first entity within a spread between lowest and highest data values of the data.

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13.   A method according to claim 1, wherein the determining operation includes ranking the data for the first entity.

5   14.   A method according to claim 13, wherein the presenting operation includes presenting a screen display for the first entity, with the screen display including an icon that is indicative of the ranking.

15.   A method according to claim 14, wherein:

10   the determining operation includes determining which of two or more percentage ranges that the data for the first entity falls within, with the two or more percentage ranges including a first percentage range and a second percentage range;

the icon is a first icon; and

the operation of presenting the screen display includes:

15   presenting the first icon in response to determining that the data for the first entity falls within the first percentage range, and

presenting a second icon, which is different from the first icon, in response to determining that the data for the first entity falls within the second percentage range.

20   16.   A method according to claim 15, wherein the first and second icons are different colors.

17.   A method according to claim 1, wherein the data for the first entity is second data for a second period, and the method further comprises the operations of:

25   receiving first data for a first period for the first entity, wherein the first period is prior to the second period,

quantifying a trending relationship between the first and second data, and

presenting information about the trending relationship to the first entity.

30   18.   A method according to claim 17, wherein the presenting operations are contemporaneous.

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19.   A method according to claim 17, wherein the operation of presenting information about the trending relationship includes presenting a screen display for the first entity, with the screen display including a direction-indicating icon that is indicative

5   of the trending relationship between the first and second data.

20.   A method according to claim 19, wherein:

the operation of quantifying the trending relationship includes determining whether the first data is greater than or less than the second data; and

10   the operation of presenting the screen display includes orienting the direction-indicating icon in a first direction in response to determining that the first data is greater than the second data, and orienting the direction-indicating icon in a second direction, which is different from the first direction, in response to determining that the first data is less than the second data.

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21.   A method according to claim 19, wherein:

the operation of determining a rating value includes ranking the data for the first entity; and

the operation of presenting the rating value includes presenting an icon that is

20   indicative of the ranking in the screen display so that one of the icons overlays the other of the icons.

22.   A computer-readable medium having computer-executable instructions for performing the operations recited in claim 1.

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23.   A method of calculating values for a performance indicator for a plurality of business entities, comprising the operations of:

obtaining a first plurality of account balances for a first entity and a second plurality of account balances for a second entity;

30   calculating a first sum of a first group of account balances that is a subset of the first plurality of account balances, wherein the account balances of the first group

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encompass respective aspects of the first entity so that the first group consists of a first set of aspects;

        calculating a second sum of a second group of account balances that is a subset of the second plurality of account balances, wherein the account balances of the second group encompass respective aspects of the second entity so that the second group consists of a second set of aspects, wherein the second set of aspects does not include all of the aspects included in the first set of aspects;

        providing an equation that is for calculating a performance indicator and that includes a plurality of inputs;

        determining a value for the performance indicator for the first entity by calculating the equation using the first sum as a first input of the inputs of the equation; and

        determining a value for the performance indicator for the second entity by calculating the equation using the first sum as the first input of the equation.

24.   A method according to claim 23, wherein the obtaining operation includes uploading the first and second plurality of account balances to a web server via the Internet, wherein the calculating and determining operations are performed by the web server.

25.   A method according to claim 23, further comprising:

establishing a mathematical frame of reference that is at least partially based upon the value of the performance indicator for the first entity and the value of the performance indicator for the second entity;

        determining a rating value based upon a relationship between the mathematical frame of reference and the value of the performance indicator for the first entity; and

        presenting the rating value to the first entity without disclosing the account balances of the second entity to the first entity.

26.   A method according to claim 23, wherein the second set of aspects includes a majority of the aspects included in the first set of aspects.

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27.   A method according to claim 23, wherein the second set of aspects is a subset of the first set of aspects.

5   28.   A computer-readable medium having computer-executable instructions for performing the operations recited in claim 23.

29.   A method of calculating values of a performance indicator for a plurality of business entities, comprising the operations of:

10   obtaining a first plurality of account balances for a first entity and a second plurality of account balances for a second entity;

calculating a first sum of a first group of account balances that is a subset of the first plurality of account balances, wherein the account balances of the first group respectively encompass sales of multiple models sold under a first brand;

15   calculating a second sum of a second group of account balances that is a subset of the second plurality of account balances, wherein the account balances of the second group respectively encompass sales of multiple models sold under a second brand, wherein the models sold under the second brand are different than the models sold under the first brand and the first brand is different from the second brand;

20   providing an equation that is for calculating a performance indicator and that includes a plurality of inputs;

determining a value for the performance indicator for the first entity by calculating the equation using the first sum as a first input of the inputs of the equation; and

25   determining a value for the performance indicator for the second entity by calculating the equation using the second sum as the first input of the equation.

30.   A method according to claim 29, further comprising:

establishing a mathematical frame of reference that is at least partially based upon

30   the value of the performance indicator for the first entity and the value of the performance indicator for the second entity;

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determining a rating value based upon a relationship between the mathematical frame of reference and the value of the performance indicator for the first entity; and

presenting the rating value to the first entity without disclosing data for the second entity to the first entity.

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31.   A method according to claim 29, wherein the obtaining operation includes uploading the first and second plurality of account balances to a web server via the Internet, wherein the calculating and determining operations are performed by the web server.

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32.   A computer-readable medium having computer-executable instructions for performing the operations recited in claim 29.

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